

This week we pay tribute to some of the most important individuals in our nation: our educators. Teachers hold the future of America in their hands. They teach our children to read, to write, to calculate, to sing, to paint, to listen, to question, to work with others, and to think for themselves. Most of us owe our teachers a great debt, not only for our education in the classroom, but for inspiring and encouraging us to be and do better. I hope Marylanders will join me in honoring our teachers and recognizing the lasting contributions they make to our communities.

Last week, Kim Oliver, a kindergarten teacher at Broad Acres Elementary School in Silver Spring, was named "Teacher of the Year" by the Council of Chief State School Officers. I am extremely proud of my fellow Marylander for receiving this extraordinary honor. Teachers like Kim are doing their part to give every child the chance to reach their God-given potential.

In the face of tremendous cultural and socioeconomic obstacles, Kim helped improve her students' test scores, increase parental involvement, and revamp Broad Acres' academic performance. She is one of the many teachers making a personal investment in the future of our nation.

Despite some success stories, many teachers across the nation are facing increasingly dire circumstances, including insufficient resources, exploding school enrollments, and overcrowded classrooms. That's why I was so disappointed that President Bush's proposed budget cuts overall education funding by 3.8 percent, and eliminates 42 education programs, including many critical to Maryland.

In addition, No Child Left Behind funding is \$15.4 billion short of the amount promised by the President. His budget fails to keep the bipartisan promise of No Child Left Behind, the landmark education law that aimed to increase performance and accountability in all public schools.

Teachers are also critical to our nation's competitiveness in the global economy. A Committee of the National Academy of Sciences, which included Maryland Superintendent of Schools Nancy Grasmick, released an important report last fall called "Rising Against the Gathering Storm." In calling for a major investment to increase the number of math and science teachers, it stated, "this nation must prepare with great urgency to preserve its strategic and economic security." To address this call, House Democrats launched an "Innovation Agenda" earlier this year which included a substantial proposal to increase the number of U.S. math and science teachers by 10,000 annually. This type of commitment to our nation's teachers is critical to future competitiveness.

America must give teachers the tools and rewards they deserve – a livable salary, safe classrooms, and sufficient resources for quality instruction – if they are to meet the high expectations we've set. If we forsake our obligation to teachers, the future of America's children is at risk.

Tomorrow, I will be joined by the winners of the Agnes Meyer Outstanding Teacher Award for lunch in Waldorf. These educators were described by Donald E. Graham, chairman of the Washington Post, as sensational and spectacular. I join him in offering my congratulations.

As we celebrate Teacher Appreciation Week, it is important to reflect on all teachers do for our community. On a daily basis, they bring the dedication, passion, and caring nature that serve as a guiding force in helping our children develop into healthy, happy, and successful adults.

We expect a great deal from our teachers and we owe them a great deal in return. Aside from parents, there is no group of individuals with greater responsibility for children. As Henry Adams said, "a teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops." Today and always, I encourage all of you to thank our teachers for the life changing work that they do.